



October 16, 2016
Pastoral Intern Ellis White
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Thy Will Be Done Matthew 6:10b

My wife, Rachel, and I have begun to realize that we have two very strong-willed children. I don't know why we would have expected otherwise. As a child I was known widely for my ability to throw a mega-tantrum; so much so that some of my mom's friends stopped agreeing to look after me. Well, we got the ultimate taste of our own kids' strong-willed nature back in August. Rachel and I had just got back from a night away with my mom looking after the kids, and I think our kids decided to punish us. They were crying and screaming and throwing themselves on the floor. Plus, it didn't help that the adults were also having a heated conversation... And then, my son, Ezra, who was just over a year old at the time, decided he wasn't getting enough attention.

Rachel had just popped out to the garage when my mom handed Ezra to me shouting, "He's not breathing!" He had been eating dinner, so I flipped him over and started smacking him on the back thinking he was choking. He wasn't. I turned him the other way up and he was as stiff as a board and his eyes had rolled into the back of his head. I was freaked out. Rachel came running back in hearing all the shouting and grabbed him out of my arms, at which point he went all limp with his eyes still rolling backwards. Thankfully, he began to cry again and eventually his eyes returned to normal and he became less limp. We had no idea what had happened. Rachel's shouting at me, "Call 911!" But I'm like, "Are you sure? He looks like he's doing okay now." Yeah... Good one, Dad! So I said, "We live virtually next-door to the hospital! I'm not calling for an ambulance, let's get in the car." After several hours of waiting, the wonderful doctors and nurses at St Anthony determined that all we had was a very strong-willed child who had decided to hold his breath until he passed out.

We're working our way through what is probably the most prayed prayer in the history of the world—The Lord's Prayer. We find it in the middle of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew. Last weekend Pastor Bill spoke about the first half of Matthew 6:10—"Your kingdom come." This weekend, we're going to look at the second half. So hear the Word of the Lord: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10b) This is the Word of the Lord. Pray.

3rd Person vs 2nd Person

With this verse we come to the end of the first half of the Lord's Prayer. As we understand it, there are seven petitions or requests in the Lord's Prayer, plus an

opening statement. The first three of those petitions are the ones we've covered these last few weeks: (1) Hallowed be your name. (2) Your kingdom come. (3) Your will be done. Next week we'll start in the second set of petitions with (4) Give us this day our daily bread. (5) Forgive us our debts. (6) Lead us not into temptation. (7) Deliver us from evil.

As I was studying it this week, I was struck by something a commentator pointed out. He noted that the first three petitions have the verb—the action word—in the third person, but the last four petitions have the verb in the second person. Now, most of you are saying: what? Let me put it this way. If I were to rewrite the first three in the second person, to be in line with the last four, it would actually read: (1) Hallow your name. (2) Bring your kingdom. (3) Do your will. But that isn't what we pray. And I think this is important. If we prayed it this way, it would be entirely up to God to hallow his name, bring his kingdom and do his will. But the way it is written, I believe means that it isn't entirely up to God to hallow his name, bring his kingdom and do his will. I believe the way we pray means that we, his people, have a role to play in the hallowing of his name, in the coming of his kingdom, and in the doing of his will.

It's the same in my relationship with my 3-year old daughter, Evelyn. There are some things in her relationship with me, her father, that I alone do. Evelyn doesn't go out and earn money to put food on the table, that's my job. But, when it's time to clear up the food on the table, I won't do that myself, but will invite Evelyn to do it with me. Some things only I do. Other things I could do myself, but I choose for Evelyn to join me. It's the same with God. Some things he alone does. Other things, he chooses to invite us to join him.

Now, this is incredibly important. This means that in these areas, God is calling us to cooperate with him to bring about these things. That it isn't just up to him, but it is us and him together. In the second half of the prayer, we are looking entirely to God to do those things. He is to give us our bread. He is to forgive us our debts. He is to lead us not into temptation. He is to deliver us from evil. But in this first half, including today's part of the prayer: "Your will be done," we have a role to play.

Doing God's Will in Matthew's Gospel

What's interesting about this particular phrase, "Your will be done," in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, is that we don't find it in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. Scholars have come up with lots of reasons for why, with no one really agreeing, but, one commentator noted that it does show a particular emphasis of Matthew. Matthew's gospel is all about disciple-making, about how to be and make followers of Jesus; it's littered with references to things we don't find in other gospels, like the Great Commission. And one thing that Matthew emphasizes about being a disciple—a follower of Jesus—is "Doing the will of God." One commentator put it this way: "'Doing the will of God' is for Matthew a potent summary of the disciple life.'

Not only does Matthew use this phrase here, where Luke doesn't, but later in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records Jesus saying: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) Jesus defines that those who enter his kingdom are not those who simply pay lip service to him, but those who do his Father's will. And again, later in Matthew's gospel, when Jesus' mother and brothers come to find him he turns to the people he is with and says: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" To which Jesus himself answers: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50) Jesus defines who is in his family, not by blood relation, but by who is doing what the Father wants. "'Doing the will of God' is for Matthew a potent summary of the disciple life.'

And this is all fun and games until we realize: oh, doing the Father's will is really hard. In fact, I would say it is impossible. If you go and read through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, you will see laid out for us what it looks like to do the Father's will, and it is impossible. The Father's will isn't just that you don't murder, but that you don't get angry or even call someone a fool... not just don't commit adultery, but don't even look lustfully at another person. Make sure you always keep your word... always. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Don't look to money for happiness. Don't be anxious. Don't judge. Do to others as you would want them to do to you. I mean seriously... who can do this? No one! I can't even get through 30 minutes without doing what I want instead of what my heavenly Father wants. So what hope do I have?

The Gospel: Jesus Did God's Will

Well, there was one person who did the will of his Father: his Son, Jesus. And it wasn't always easy. Matthew gives us a glimpse into just how difficult it was for Jesus to do his Father's will towards the end of his gospel. On the night before Jesus was executed on the cross, he had his last meal with his disciples. After the meal, Jesus went with his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane. He asked them to sit down while he went and prayed. He took with him Peter, James and John, his three closest friends, and in one of Jesus' most authentic moments he told them how he was really feeling about facing execution the next day. This is what he said to them: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." (Matthew 26:38)

Jesus knew his Father's will was that he would go to the cross. Jesus knew that it was only through the cross, through his perfect sacrifice, that our sins could be washed away and that we could have relationship to our heavenly Father restored. But Jesus knew how painful it was going to be. He knew what was facing him was something he had never experienced before: the feeling of separation from his Heavenly Father. And Jesus was so sad, so sorrowful that he felt like his life was being crushed by it. And he asked his friends to keep a vigil with him. Jesus went a

little further away, fell down on his face, and then cried out in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) Jesus says, "Father. I can't do this. If there is any way around the cross, please, let me have it. But no matter what, I won't do what I want, I'll do what you want."

Jesus here shows us what it really looks like to pray, "Thy will be done." He shows us that when everything around us seems to be crushing in, when life is at its most painful, we can pray to God to give us a way out—we can cry out to him to find another way. But, ultimately, we must be willing to do it his way, even if it hurts. And here's what's amazing... because Jesus followed through on that prayer, because he went to the cross in our place, because he took upon himself the penalty for our sin, we now stand free of condemnation. That means something very significant for us when it comes to doing God's will. It means all the times we haven't gone God's way and done His will, all the times it was too hard, just too difficult, were laid upon Jesus on the cross. And all the times we have still yet to go God's way, all the times in the future that we decide to go our way, were all laid upon Jesus on the cross. And we now stand free.

The truth is we can never fully go God's way in this life. But we don't have to. Jesus already went God's way—to the cross. We no longer need to go God's way to please him—Jesus has already done that. We no longer need to go God's way to make us right with Him—Jesus has already done that. We no longer need to go God's way to gain eternal life—Jesus has already done that. The cross is the ultimate answer to the prayer: "Thy will be done." In Christ, we have already done the will of the Father, all we need do is believe.

Why Go God's Way?: Study Story

So why go God's way? If Jesus has already done it for us, why bother? Why? Because God's way is better. It's so much better. Far better than we can even imagine. Last month I was really feeling under pressure with how much studying I had left to complete before ordination. I had little margin for error, even working my plan as best I could. I felt like I had to control every moment of my time, and I couldn't afford to let others use my time for their problems. As you can probably guess that resulted in a few ugly moments of behavior as I fought to maintain control of my time. Eventually, on a prayer walk, I heard God saying to me: it's My time, not yours. I knew I had to give it back to Him.

When I did so that morning, on that walk, I came back home feeling lighter. More free. And then, the next two days blew me away. In two conversations with two different tutors, who advocated to others on my behalf, my study load was reduced by over three weeks. That may not sound like much, but when you feel like you have zero margin, three weeks feels like a miracle! As I reflect back now, I recognize that God's way was so much better than my way. I could have got it done my way, but who knows how many relationships I might have burned in the

process. It was a clear reminder for me of the goodness of our Heavenly Father. I don't have to go God's way, but I want to. I don't have to do God's will, but I want to.

How Do We Know God's Will?

And maybe you're sitting here today and you know exactly what God's will is. Perhaps as I've been speaking it's become clear to you exactly what your garden of Gethsemane moment is. The place where you are struggling to do what God wants, even though you know you have to, and you just need to surrender your will to his, and trust that his way is so much better. But I realize, there may be many of us here today who might be struggling with this topic because we feel like we don't know God's will. You're saying: "Well that's great Ellis. God's way is better, I agree. But I don't know what God's way is right now. I wish I did. If I did, I would go his way. I really would. But I don't know which way to go." So I want to close by talking a little bit about an aspect of prayer that we haven't mentioned much, but it is a very important aspect of prayer as it relates to the prayer of 'Thy will be done.' This aspect of prayer is listening prayer.

Prayer is not just a one-way deal. Prayer is ultimately about relationship with our heavenly Father as Pastor Mark preached in the first two weeks of this series. And relationships are two-way. They involve both speaking and listening. All week I was toying with the idea of whether or not to share about this, but God just kept bringing me back to listening. Sunday night at the young families' potluck, my wife Rachel shared that the women were all talking about the "God's Reply" column in our Chapel Hill prayer journals. Wednesday night at God Space, Eric Engelland was teaching all about listening—both to God and others. And Thursday morning in my LifeGroup that meets at the Y, where we use the prayer journal, we did the listening exercise written for this week. It was almost like God was speaking to me...

God Speaks in The Silence

And I want to let you know that for many of us, the reality is that God is speaking already, we just need to pay attention. For a lot of us we think that hearing from God is like some thunderbolt from the sky. Or like tonight's / last night's storm of the century. And I'm reminded of the story of Elijah, after he had fought his massive battle with the prophets of Baal and had run off to the hills in his depression. In that moment God met him and God's presence passed by him. This is what 1 Kings 19 says: "And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper." (1 Kings 19:11–12)

According to the notes in the ESV, that word 'low whisper' could also mean 'thin silence.' I wonder if for many of us we're expecting God to speak to us in a way

that is clear and plain and obvious. And the reality is that he already has. It's right here and it's called the Bible. But when God does speak to us in our everyday lives, I find that most people experience his voice when they themselves are most silent, most still. So often our lives are filled with noise that we don't take those moments to be still. On a walk. In the car with the radio off. In bed late at night. Early in the morning before sunrise. I believe that in those moments, God is speaking, if we are willing to listen. Are you listening?

Practice Makes Perfect

Since the death of my father earlier this year, I've been seeing a counselor, and last month, my wife began joining me. Not because our marriage is having problems, but because our circumstances have changed and we want to make sure our marriage is adapting. One of the things our counselors have emphasized is knowing your spouse's relational needs and seeking to meet them. And over time, as I have gotten to know Rachel, I've grown to know her needs. But, there are still some things I don't know unless I ask. So I'm learning to stop and say, "Honey, I want to love you the best I can. Can you tell me what you really need right now?" And then, here's the key: I have to quieten my thoughts and listen to what she says.

In the same way, if we want to know God's will, we need to quieten ourselves down. To make that moment of thin silence in our day. To still our thoughts and to listen. And I promise you that just like my ability to hear what Rachel is really saying over time has grown with practice, your ability to hear what God is saying will grow over time with practice. And I want to lead us in a practice of that today. It's the same practice I lead my LifeGroup in earlier this week from the prayer journal, and it's called *Lectio Divina*, which in Latin means Divine Reading.

[Prayer Response: *Lectio Divina* on Matthew 26:36-46]